As part of CleanMed Europe 2016 - Europe’s leading conference on sustainable healthcare, on Tuesday 18th October, Health Care Without Harm (HCWH) Europe organised a workshop entitled Sustainable and Healthy Food in Healthcare.

The workshop was hosted by Gentofte Hospital in Copenhagen, a very progressive hospital in procurement of fresh, seasonal, and organic food, and food waste management and reduction.

The day’s events started with a delicious and organic meal for all participants at the hospital staff canteen. In addition to cold and hot dishes and to a salad bar, homemade rye bread, fruit and tap water is also available.

After lunch, HCWH Europe’s Deputy Director, Grazia Cioci, presented HCWH Europe’s work on sustainable food in the past few years, and the more recent work on food waste prevention and reduction strategies through a survey of European hospitals prioritising sustainable and healthy food policies.

Over 30 experts from hospitals, academia, non-profit organisations, and municipalities gathered at Gentofte Hospital to share their best practices and experiences from their countries on the two main topics of the workshop: sustainable and healthy food and food waste.

Food in public institutions, particularly in hospitals, should be seen as a pleasant experience, however, there are still many challenges in providing sustainable and tasty food in hospitals. Therefore, opportunities for the healthcare sector to improve food served in healthcare facilities were discussed throughout the workshop and recommendations were sought.
The first session: Sustainable and healthy food challenges and opportunities, was opened by Bernhard Kromp, Head of the Institut Bio Forschung in Austria.

Mr. Kromp gave an overview of the green public procurement of food produce in Vienna, which contributes to climate change mitigation and environmental protection. In Vienna the procurement of food ensures healthy nutrition for up to 100,000 people daily, including students, patients, the elderly, and public employees.

Their green criteria includes:
- Minimum 30% of organic food produce
- Less than 2% trans fats
- Drinking water provided from the tap and drinking fountains

The introduction of organic produce has saved 11,700t CO2-eq/year, as assessed by some projects (SUFI, UMBESA, BIOFAIR). Other initiatives adopted by the Vienna City Council to protect the environment and save money include reducing meat consumption whilst promoting increased fruit and vegetable consumption. At the Vienna Hospital Association (KAV) - a HCWH Europe member and one of Europe’s largest healthcare systems, organic food procurement varies at each hospital from 25% to around 50%. In addition, particular effort has been made to serve seasonal dishes and develop special menus throughout the year.

Despite this progress, some challenges still exist fuelled by an ambition to:
- Enlarge the quota for organic produce
- Purchase more regional food
- Keep/establish energy-efficient kitchen systems
- Avoid food waste in canteens and kitchen
- Promote healthy and sustainable diets
- Work on social responsibility by procuring fair-trade products.

Examples from Solna, Sweden then followed, Katarina Ask and Catarina Offe presented Karolinska University Hospital’s new food policy, adopted in order to fulfil their sustainability goals. Their goals are to provide more sustainable food to patients, that helps reduce the hospital carbon footprint, and to provide the right amount of food at the right time. At the new Karolinska University Hospital they try to influence the market through their procurement and therefore receive what they are ask for, not what is simply available. This purchasing power was achieved by conducting a thorough analysis of the market.
At the Karolinska University Hospital, reducing 25% of food waste from patient food is an important goal. In 2016 they conducted a study - they weighed food waste for one week in each of their 20 departments and wards, conducted interviews and surveys, and visited their two main sites: Huddinge and Solna. The results of this study showed that their food waste was greater than estimated. To reduce food waste, they have established an action plan that will also maintain quality and patient safety.

This action plan includes common challenges faced by all hospitals, such as:

- Staff training and education
- Efficiency of the ordering systems
- Stock control
- Provision of tailored portion sizes according to patient’s characteristics and food preferences

Ultimately, the prevention and reduction of food waste begins with increased awareness, participation, and enthusiasm.

The discussion during this first session turned to the on-going debate of an onsite vs off site kitchen/getting your supplies from an off-site kitchen, the latter option can allow you to establish your own wishes and requirements and engage the private sector in the sustainable agenda, although HCWH Europe propose all hospitals have their own kitchen. Other topics discussed included: looking for indicators to evaluate and monitor your food procurement (in environmental, social and health terms), the trade-offs between organic and locally produced food, and the relationship between organic produce and food waste.

### Food waste challenges and opportunities

In the second session, *Food waste challenges and opportunities*, Senior Scientist of Wageningen University & Research, Joost Snels presented the waste prevention and reduction methodology of healthcare that is being conducted in the Netherlands.

To understand and find improvement actions to reduce food waste, hospitals should first measure food waste.

This methodology is comprised of four main steps:
1. Identification
2. Measuring
3. Analysis
4. Reporting
This methodology is easy to implement as all steps are fully described, and the results are comparable within the same and other types of institution.

Reducing food waste is an investment opportunity hospitals can consider, i.e. improving patients’ meals, and reducing malnutrition and hospitalisations, instead of just a cost reduction. It is possible to create realistic objectives by not only involving just the food (facility) department, but also the people responsible for care in the measurements, sharing of the results, and looking for possibilities to reinvest.

Find out more about Joost Snels’ work at the Wageningen UR here.

Our hosts, the Gentofte and Herlev Hospitals in Denmark, also presented in the second session. Sisse Hørup Larsen and Nina Johanne Spaabæk, provided us with some practical recommendations on reducing food waste and increasing patient satisfaction. The kitchen at the Gentofte Hospital works under three main objectives: provide the best dining experience for their patients, reduce food waste, and obtain direct feedback from patients about the food toward to the ward hostesses (who deliver food according to patients’ needs, and take the leftovers directly back to the kitchen in order to adjust the portions and remove unpopular items from the menu).

Their reduction of food waste started from a 2013 study conducted in the medical and orthopaedic wards, approximately 60 people participated and a whole new concept was created. This concept includes: kitchen staff serving all three meals on weekdays, new menus with smaller portions, and a snack cart twice daily for both patients and visitors. They wish to continue developing this concept by reducing use of plastics, providing money for purchasing organic food as a way of reinvestment, and rethinking the cooking process. This rethinking includes: procuring more fresh, seasonal and local produce, baking bread and cakes on site an/or reducing the menu choices.
At the end of the workshop, HCWH Europe launched its Healthy and Sustainable Food in Healthcare Pledge, based on a pledge started by HCWH US and has been supported by over 550 hospitals and healthcare facilities across US and Canada.

By signing the pledge, European hospitals commit to:

- Improve the quality of the food they serve by procuring fresh, local, seasonal and organic food as much as possible
- Offer more plant-derived food
- Shorten the supply chain and strengthen the local economy
- Prevent and decrease food waste and explore alternatives
- Raise awareness among healthcare professionals, patients, and communities about the link between healthy and sustainable food to ensure a more resilient food system
- Influence and engage other actors to work towards better standards of food procurement whilst promoting healthy and sustainable habits and practices within and outside the healthcare sector

The Gentofte and Herlev Hospitals signed this pledge at our workshop, so we now call on other European hospitals and healthcare facilities to commit to healthy and sustainable food: sign the pledge today!

Click here to sign the pledge today!

HCWH Europe wishes to thank all participants and attendees for their great contributions and sharing best practices to achieve a sustainable and healthy food policy at their institutions. We look forward to a second workshop in 2017 and engaging more participants in this discussion in order to elevate food to the heart of healing.